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POLITICS

# “The Snake”: Donald Trump brings back his favorite anti-immigrant fable at CPAC

Trump returns to his core message: immigrants want to kill you.

by **Dara Lind**

Updated Feb 23, 2018, 6:46 PM UTC



Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

What President Donald Trump gave the crowd at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) Friday morning wasn't just rhetorical red meat. It was rhetorical severed limbs, dripping with blood.

Trump's CPAC speech was a fantasia on his favorite theme: Immigrants are dangerous and they want to kill you



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Trump's CPAC speech was a fantasia on his favorite theme: Immigrants are dangerous and they want to kill you.

MS-13 are hiding out in sanctuary cities and they're coming for you and want to kill you. "These are animals. They cut people. They cut them. They cut them up in little pieces, and they want them to suffer. And we take them into our country."

Countries are sending bad people to the US via the diversity visa lottery and they want to kill you. "We pick out people. Then they turn out to be horrendous. And we don't understand why. They're not giving us their best people, folks [...] I don't want people who drive a car at 100 miles an hour down the West Side Highway, and kill eight innocent victims and destroy the lives of 14 more."

Border Patrol and ICE agents have to be absolutely ruthless because they're the only line of defense against people who want to kill you. "All they understand is toughness," Trump said of MS-13, and "we have the toughest guys you've ever seen. We got tough. They don't respect anything else."

And Democrats are siding against those agents, and against the American people, tacitly supporting people who want to kill you. "They're against safety," Trump said. "You meet with Democrats and they're always fighting for the criminal. They're not fighting for law-abiding citizens."

He even did "The Snake" — the recitation of a song that Trump repurposed as an anti-immigration parable during his campaign, in which a snake asks to be taken into a woman's home and repays her for her charity by killing her. He all but made the crowd beg for it, as if it was an encore at a rock concert:

When I walked in today, did anyone ever hear me do the snake during the campaign? Because I had five people outside say, could you do the snake? I said, well, people have heard it. Who hasn't heard the snake? You should read it anyway. Let's do it anyway. I'll do it. Okay. Should we do it?

After reminding the crowd multiple times to think of it in terms of immigration — in case the subtext might have gotten missed — he recited it to applause:

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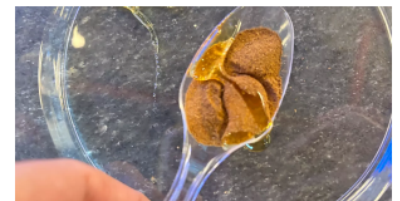
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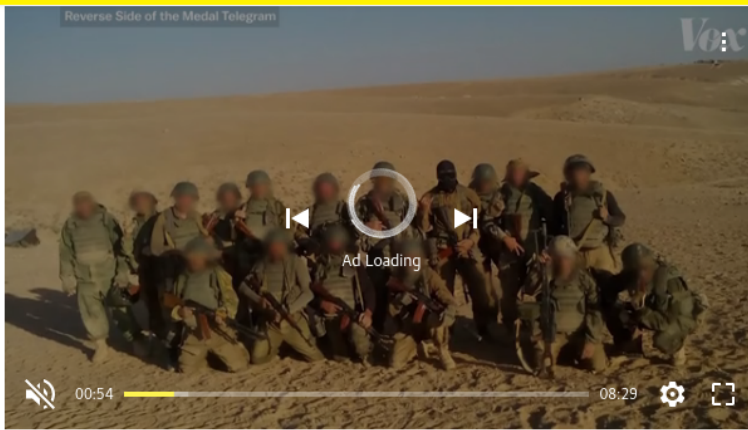
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*I saved you, cried the woman. And you've bitten me, heavens why?  
You know your bite is poisonous and now I'm going to die.  
Oh, shut up, silly woman, said the reptile with a grin.  
You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in. [ Applause ]*

And that's what we're doing with our country, folks. We're letting people in. And it is going to be a lot of trouble. It is only getting worse.

Over the past year, some in the media have realized, belatedly, that the Trump administration is hawkish on both legal and unauthorized immigration. But that was always their fault. “The Snake” was never a parable about “illegal immigration.” It was always about “immigration,” full stop.

Most politicians’ biggest applause lines are statements about the America they want to see. Donald Trump’s biggest applause line is about how America is letting in people who will kill you. It’s a fear that Trump uses to justify his legislative agenda — building a wall on the US-Mexico border; tightening asylum law to make it much harder for unaccompanied children and families to enter the US; and drastically cutting legal immigration, particularly family-based immigration — but it is not, fundamentally, about the policy. It is about the feelings that being at a Trump rally evokes: the effervescence of being in a room where everyone passionately agrees with you, and the loyalty and thankfulness engendered by being among leaders who say the world is a terrible place from which they will protect you.

Donald Trump was reciting “The Snake” long before he started talking about chain migration or even MS-13. And he knows that “The Snake,” not the policy, is what his audience wants.

The lines between salesmanship, hucksterism, and demagoguery have always been very blurry with Trump. And the intersection of them is the place he’s always been most comfortable — as a candidate, and as a president. Time and again, when Trump is in front of friendly audiences — whether it’s a group of police officers on Long Island or a group of



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It’s an incredibly dangerous thing to have people going around on the street believing. But that doesn’t appear to bother the president much. After all, he gets the applause.

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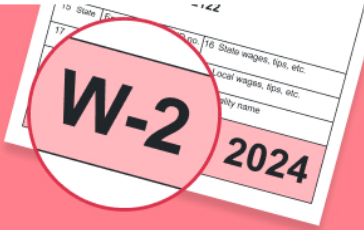
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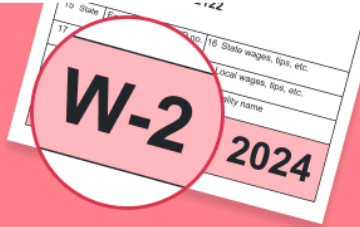





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